

# Dealer to Dealer INTERVIEW

## An Interview with Derren Brown by Micky Middleton

Derren Brown is best known as a brilliant showman and illusionist, once firing a loaded gun at his head on live television. His TV shows attract audiences in the millions and his live shows play to sell-out audiences every night.



above: Micky Middleton, Derren Brown and Rebecca Hossack

right: Outside the gallery

below: Anthony Hopkins

**I**n his spare time Derren uses a very different skill; he is an exceptionally talented artist. This month he chose to reveal his private collection of paintings, which he has worked on for more than twenty years, in his first ever solo show. Derren paints caricatures of famous faces from around the world: celebrities from Anthony Hopkins to Amy Winehouse have appeared on his canvases. I visited his exhibition in Fitzroy Square within London's hip Fitzrovia and chatted with Derren to find out more about this multi-talented showman.

*Derren, you studied Law & German at Bristol University, yet you were a keen painter as a child - why didn't you embark upon an art degree?*

I had a very traditional schooling and decided on Law as it's so versatile and I have always enjoyed German as a language at school. As a child and growing up, painting was always a very passionate hobby, but I didn't think of taking it up as a career.

*Also, can you recall when you first thought "this is what I'm going to paint" and can you tell us more about your early years - any early childhood influences?*

Yes, I did my first caricature at thirteen of my math's teacher who had a great face. His features were really interesting and prominent.

*You are influenced by the German artist Sebastian Kruger who also paints personality portraits - why do painting caricatures of famous faces appeal to you so much?*

It was an obvious choice really: painting people that others would recognise, a natural progression from drawing teachers as a kid. The way we see celebrities is generally very well controlled by their PR machinery, and I find that interesting to play with.

*Why did you decide to take this direction with your work?*



It's just something I've always done. And maybe, in the same way as there's an appeal in taking 'magic' and doing something different with it, I enjoy doing something a little different with caricature (which is normally very cartoony) too.

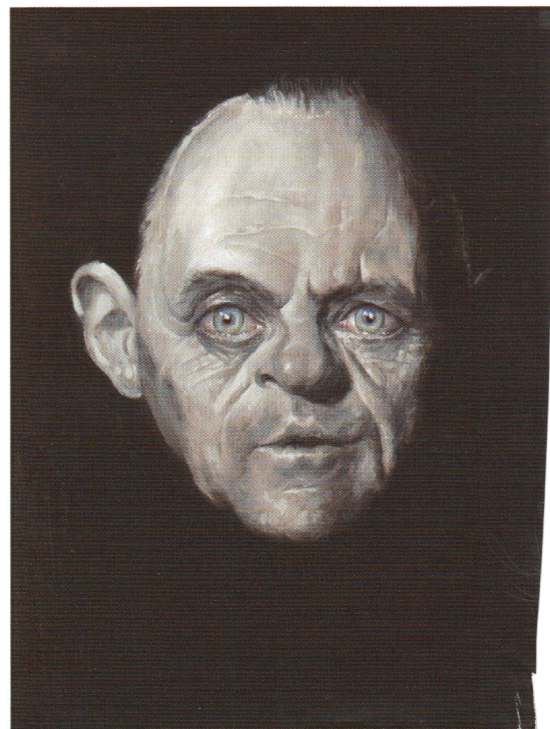
*Have you met many of the famous people you have painted?*

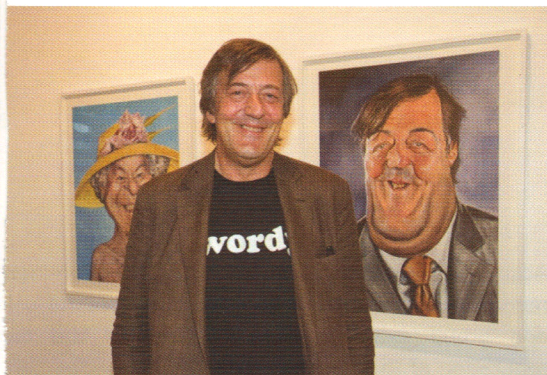
Yes, the TV work certainly takes me in that direction. Not many, but some have become friends. Stephen Fry, Simon Callow and David Tennant I suppose I know best from these subjects.

*How do you decide who to paint?*

It's whoever is sticking in my mind at the time. I find myself obsessing slightly and eager to get a painting done. I then mainly take reference from whatever images I can find of them.

*I notice throughout the exhibition and throughout your new book, Derren Brown Portraits, that you predominantly paint men over women. Is there a reason for this?*





es, I find with celebrities in particular that the caricature lends itself much better to the characteristics of the male features, when dealing with generally attractive people. Hollywood women have their features near-airbrushed out in photos; it's part of achieving the almost 'doll-like' ideal we have for women. Images of men tend to be much harsher – more light and shade. The upshot is that when you make more of the features, attractive women tend to look less like themselves. It just lends itself better to male faces, generally. On the other hand, I have painted plenty of women, but they've chosen few for this exhibition.

Do you have any particular favourites in people you have painted? And, why?

es, I really enjoyed painting Tom Waits, and Anthony Hopkins was a favourite of mine; his face can be so strong and yet so soft that each time you look at it you see something new. I found the groove that runs down the left hand of his forehead fascinating in particular, and find myself mesmerised by it in his films.

Is there a message you desire viewers to be left with after observing your work?

Not especially – I just love the faces and it would be nice to think that some of that affection and particular way of seeing them would be enjoyed by a viewer.

Is there a specific period of art history that inspires you?

I'm deeply into the Italian Renaissance, which began the opening of a period of great cultural change and achievement in Europe. But I wouldn't dream of connecting that with my own work!

Can you go into detail about your artistic process? What sort of planning goes into one of your paintings? Do you do preliminary drawings? Do you snap the face out in your mind?

I start by gathering together some photographs and make a pencil sketch directly onto a large canvas. I don't consciously exaggerate anything; I just sketch what I see. This is how I see people and it's always given me a good memory for faces. The whole process then comes together as I add the paint.

As a full time illusionist and magician, how do you find time to paint?

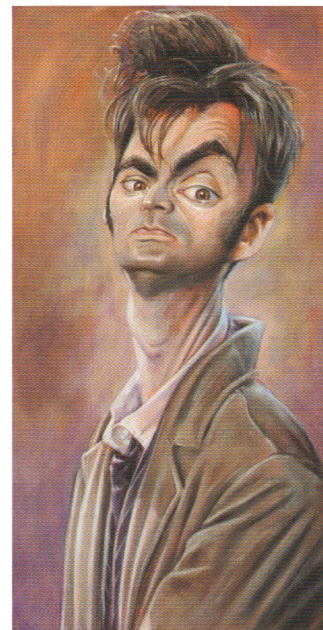
I haven't managed to paint since last September due to TV, book and tour commitments, but it's a hobby so if I have a free weekend at home I will normally paint.

Who are you planning to work on next?

I might re-paint Rufus Wainwright. I've met him a few times since painting him and I see him a little differently now.

Derren's exhibition also celebrates the launch of his new book *Derren Brown Portraits*, the first ever collection of his amazing caricatures and his new collection of sixteen published fine art giclée prints, which have been signed and numbered to a small edition of 50.

*Derren Brown - Portraits runs until 22 August at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery, 28 Charlotte Street, London, W1T 2NA. Telephone: +44 (0) 207 2552828. www.r-h-g.co.uk*



left: Stephen Fry, who bought the Bertrand Russell print

above: David Tennant

below: Stephen Fry